

GENESIS AND THE CUNEIFORM INSCRIPTIONS.

BY H. W. MENGEDOHT.

ON December the 12th, 1872, a discovery which astonished the whole world and especially the world of Biblical study was announced. On that day Mr. George Smith read before the Society of Biblical Archæology in London a paper containing a translation of an Assyrian tablet in the British Museum which gave the Chaldean account of the Deluge, an account which presented astonishing agreement with the Biblical version.

This wonderful inscription may well be called the Magna Charta of Assyriology, for it established at once and forever its importance as an aid to Biblical study. The inscription has been so often translated and commented upon that there is no need to make a detailed examination of it here, but some of the more important features deserve notice.

The gods decide to make a deluge to punish men for their sins. The opening lines read:

“I will declare to thee the hidden word and the decision of the gods will I reveal to thee.

In the city of Suripak which thou knowest, that city was ancient when the gods within it, their hearts prompted them to make a deluge.”

One just man named Shamas-napishtim or Tzit-napishtim (Living Sun) was, however, to be saved by the intervention of the god Ea or Ia, and he is directed by Ea to build an ark or ship:

“Pull down thy house and build a ship,

Forsake thy possessions and take care of thy life,

Abandon thy goods and save thy life

And bring up the seed of everything into the ship.”

The wise man Tzit-napishtim did as he was told and the deluge began. The inscription further describes in the most graphic

manner the terrible storm which swept the land for seven days and destroyed all. The mother goddess then laments over the destruction of her people:

“The old race of man has been turned into clay
Because I assented to this evil in the council of the gods
And agreed to a storm which hath destroyed my people.
That which I brought forth, where is it?
Like the spawn of fish it filleth the sea.”

For seven days and six nights the wind blew and the deluge and tempest overwhelmed the land. When the seventh day drew



THE CHALDEAN ACCOUNT OF THE DELUGE.

Clay tablet, 650 B. C., British Museum. (By permission of the Trustees.)

nigh the deluge, tempest and storm ceased. The ship rested on Mount Nizir (Safety) for twelve days and then another week.

We have now the episode of the sending forth of the birds, the dove, the raven and the swallow:

“On the seventh day I sent forth a dove and let her go.
The dove flew hither and thither,
But there was no resting-place for her and she returned.
I sent out a swallow¹ and let her go forth.

¹ The swallow was called by the Babylonians “the bird of destiny.”

The swallow flew hither and thither,
 But there was no resting-place for her and she returned.
 Then I sent forth a raven and let her go.
 The raven flew away and beheld the abatement of the
 waters.

And she came near, wading and croaking but she returned
 not.

Then I brought all forth to the four winds of Heaven."

Next we have an account of the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and
 an interesting reference to the rainbow:

"The Lady of the gods drew nigh

And she lifted up the great arches which Anu had made
 according to his wish."

Then a covenant is made that there shall be no more deluge,
 and Tzit-napishtim and his wife are translated "to be like the gods
 in the sacred region at the mouth of the rivers."

It can well be imagined what an excitement such a discovery
 caused, and in 1875 it was followed by a still more startling one,
 namely that of the Babylonian tablets of Creation. This discovery
 excited as much if not more interest than that of the Deluge;
 and the inscriptions have been published and commented on by
 nearly every Assyriologist of importance.

The opening lines of the first tablet show a striking similarity
 to the Mosaic account:

"When on high the heaven was not named,
 On the earth below a name was not recorded,
 The primeval Apsu (Deep) begat them
 And Chaos Tiamat was the mother of them all.
 The waters were gathered together,
 No field was formed, no marsh was seen
 When (as yet) the gods had not been called into being.
 None bore a name and no destinies were ordained.
 Then were created the gods in the midst of heaven."

The next tablet of importance is the fifth, which describes the
 creation of the stars, moon and sun, the arrangement of the signs
 of the zodiac and the regulation of the measurement of time. Re-
 cently Mr. L. W. King of the British Museum has discovered a
 small fragment which describes the creation of man. It reads:

"When Marduk heard the word of the gods
 His heart prompted him and he devised a cunning plan.
 He opened his mouth and spake to Ea.

That which he had conceived in his mind he imparted to him:

My blood I will take and bone I will fashion,

I will make man, that man may. . . .²

I will create man that he shall inhabit the earth."

This fragment, unfortunately much mutilated, does not accord completely with the Hebrew account in Gen. ii. 4-7, but agrees with the version of the Greco-Chaldean historian and priest Berosus. There is another story of the creation of man found in the Gilgamesh-Nimrod epic which is especially interesting. The story relates to a companion for the hero Gilgamesh, and the creation is performed by the goddess Aruru, a mother-goddess:

"On hearing the words of the gods

Aruru planned a godlike man in her mind.

Aruru washed her hands,

She broke off a piece of clay and cast it on the ground,

Then she created Ea-bani the hero."

The expression "godlike man" (*amil ana*) closely resembles the Biblical expression "man in his own image," Gen. i. 27.

The question which now arises is as to the date of these Assyrian documents, especially in their relation to the Mosaic accounts. In the early days of the study many declared them to be copies of the Hebrew accounts, but that is now shown to be impossible. The tablets which Mr. George Smith first translated came from the royal library at Nineveh founded by Assurbanipal between 640 and 625 B.C., but they are distinctly stated to be transcripts of older documents in the Babylonian libraries. Some of these have been brought to light and among them two fragments of the Deluge Tablet, one discovered at Sippara by Dr. Scheil, the other by Dr. Hilprecht at Nippur. Both of these fragments are fortunately dated copies from the reign of the Babylonian king Ammizadugga, B.C. 1800, therefore about six hundred years before the age of Moses. The period of the first Babylonian dynasty, B.C. 2300 to B.C. 1800, was a great literary epoch and during it most of the national traditions, legends, poems, etc., were collected and committed to writing.

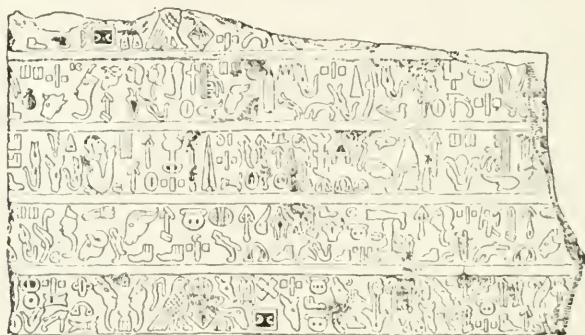
On the other hand, it is not correct to describe the Hebrew accounts of the Creation and Deluge as copied from the Babylonian versions, and this can not be too strongly insisted upon. No doubt, during the great revision of Hebrew literature in post-Captivity times under Ezra, the Babylonian traditions which the learned Jews

² Tablet broken here.

must have been familiar with in Babylon may have supplied some details, but the marked polytheistic turn of the Chaldean stories and the plain monotheism of the Jewish version preclude the theory of direct borrowing. We must look rather to a common source of tradition far back in the dim azure of the past from which the writers of both nations drew their inspiration.

Passing on now to that portion of Genesis which we will call the secular or historical portion as distinct from the early chapters containing the traditions of the Creation and Deluge, there are many which receive ample illustration from the monuments, all of which tend to prove their accuracy.

One of the most interesting of these is the purchase of the field and cave of Machpelah from Ephron the Hittite (Gen. xxiii.



AN INSCRIPTION IN HITTITE HIEROGLYPHICS.

Found at Carchemish on the Euphrates. (From J. H. Breasted, *Ancient Times*, p. 241.)

3-20). This incident has been made the basis of a severe attack by hostile critics; yet we shall see that monumental evidence has amply vindicated its accuracy: In the first place, the seller of the field is Ephron the *Hittite*. How can this be, said the critics, since the Hittites were an unknown people, and even if they existed, which was doubtful, they were only a race of barbarians and therefore quite incapable of taking part in so orderly a transaction on strictly business lines as the purchase of the cave as recorded by the Hebrew writer.

The discoveries recently made at Boghaz-Köi in Asia Minor, and at Carchemish and other sites in Syria, have brought to light a number of monuments of strange art and inscribed in a hieroglyphic script not that of Egypt. Among the documents which

come from Boghaz-Köi are a number of tablets inscribed in the cuneiform script of Babylonia and Assyria and are the letters and dispatches of the kings of the Hittites to Rameses II and other Egyptian kings of the XIXth dynasty, about B.C. 1366-1200. Rameses II defeated a confederation of the Hittite kings in a great battle at Kadesh on the Orontes and later concluded a treaty of peace and offensive and defensive alliance with them, so they must have been a people of considerable importance. A copy of this treaty was engraved in hieroglyphics on the walls of the temple of Karnak in Thebes by order of Rameses II and among the tablets found at Boghaz-Köi was a duplicate of this treaty in cuneiform characters and in the Babylonian language.

This is absolute proof of the existence of a powerful confederation of tribes known as the Hittites whose capital was in Cappadocia, on a site now represented by the rock fortress of Boghaz-Köi. This place the tablets call *alu sarruti Khati*, "the royal city of the Hittites." Some doubt has been cast on their being so far south as Hebron, but this is proved to be unwarranted by an important inscription now in the Louvre in Paris. In this inscription, which dates from the XIIth Egyptian dynasty, some time prior to the date of Abram, the writer speaks of the palaces of the Hittites in the neighborhood of the Heru-sha or Mentu, the Arabs of the southern frontier of Palestine. The Negeb having been destroyed, this region would include Hebron.

The account of the purchase of the cave of Machpelah might be taken from a Babylonian contract tablet of the time of Hammurabi, about B.C. 2200, but the similarity is explained by the fact that the laws and phraseology of Babylonian commerce were in use over the whole of Western Asia and would be thoroughly understood by Ephron the Hittite and by Abram coming from Ur of the Chaldees. In general facts and even in minutest details the account is perfectly accurate, and it affords another proof of the all-important value of the evidence of the monuments now so amply substantiating the Biblical record.